

## Wonder Machine – Part 1

Well, after uncle Wyatt passed away my brother Andy, as executor of the will, dispersed his worldly goods. Wyatt had never quite gotten around to marriage and kids, and so he'd left everything to various members of the family. Everything was quite a bit, actually. Wyatt had died a wealthy man. Once everyone had received his or her piece of the pie Andy took me aside one day and dropped a set of keys in my hand. "What's this?" "Keys to Wyatt's Wonder Machine." "His what?" "His Wonder Machine, that's what he called it. Don't you remember?" Andy had that big grin on his face that he got whenever he knew he had the upper hand. So I started thinking. Wonder Machine? Wonder Machine? And then it came to me. "When we were kids he'd tell us stories about where he'd been in his Wonder Machine." Andy's grin was on high beams now as he nodded his head. "I assumed that he was just making that stuff up." "So did I." "And he left it to me?" "The proud owner." "What am I supposed to do with it?" "Whatever you want." I forgot to ask Andy where it was stored and when I thought of it I couldn't get hold of him, but I seemed to remember that Wyatt kept it on his hobby farm, so I went out there and into the barn. The sun was slanting in through gaps and missing boards, and the resident swallows circled in the beams directly above me. In front of me, sitting precisely in the barn's middle, was an object covered entirely with a large, dusty, bird stained tarp. I took the tarp in both hands and began to slowly pull it off. Underneath was a vehicle that looked like the misbegotten offspring of a roaring '20s millionaire's yacht and a 1959 Cadillac convertible. This thing, this 'Wonder Machine', was slick, sleek, and mint. Not a scratch on it, not a ding, not a fleck of mud or dust. It was painted with some kind of rainbow coloured metallic paint and polished to a showroom gloss. It had chrome fins, chrome portholes, chrome window moldings, chrome everything. I couldn't believe what I was looking at. It was like something out of a movie, something dreamed up by Hollywood. I felt like a ten-year old, standing there in the cool, hay-smelling barn with slants of sunlight pouring in and swallows darting around. I really didn't know what to do next. I was tempted to pull the tarp back over it and get out of there quick, the 'Wonder Machine' was just too bizarre for me. But instead, after a tour around it, I opened the driver's side door and got in behind the wheel. I don't know what to say about it except that sitting there felt good, really good, almost as if it had been custom fitted to me. Any chance that I would do the sane thing and cover it back up was now gone. I opened the barn doors, climbed back in the Wonder Machine, and put the key in the ignition. There was no telling how long it had been sitting in the barn, but I figured the odds of it starting were about zero. I turned the key and, sure enough, it hummed to life effortlessly. I put it in gear and drove out, if the way it moved can be called driving. I can't explain it, but

the way it went was like when you set a sail and the wind catches it for the first time and suddenly, silently, you're gliding.

## Wonder Machine – Part 2

As Uncle Wyatt's Wonder Machine carried me away from the barn (it would be wrong to say *as I drove it*) and along a stretch of particularly pretty country road that I'd always liked, my mind began to wander back to childhood. Growing up we didn't see Uncle Wyatt very often, but when we did we'd see him for a week or two at a time. He'd come and stay with us at our place in the 'burbs and keep us up late with strange tales of places he'd been and sights he'd seen in his Wonder Machine. "Where is the Wonder Machine, Uncle Wyatt?" my brother or I would ask from time to time, as we'd never actually laid eyes on it. "Oh, I keep it hidden in a secret place," he'd say. "Can you take us there?" "I'd like to, I really would, but you see this place is so hidden and so secret that even I can't remember where it is, not exactly anyway." Well, we weren't that young or naïve. "If you don't know where it is, how are you going to go anywhere in it?" "Well, you see, when I feel the urge to get up and travel, the Wonder Machine contacts me telepathically." "You expect us to believe that?" "It's true, boys, it's true. It tells me where it is while I sleep. It comes to me in a vision and shows me where it's at." "Does it give you a map?" "Not exactly. It sort of gives me landmarks, you know, certain buildings, maybe a statue or a railway crossing, things like that." "But how do you know where these things are?" "Oh, I always recognize them. The Wonder Machine never gives me directions I can't follow." "What's the last place you traveled to, Uncle Wyatt?" And then he'd launch into a story with more twists and turns than the most elaborate labyrinth. We listened because he was a great storyteller, but as we grew older we believed less and less that his Wonder Machine was real, and by the time I was 13 and my brother 11 we treated his stories as fiction. And then, when we were about 15 and 13, we really weren't that interested in listening anymore, and we started to think of Uncle Wyatt as a sort of nut job, a harmless fraud, a guy who'd probably never gone anywhere or seen anything, who'd just made everything up. I'm ashamed now to admit it, but we basically wrote off Uncle Wyatt as a liar. He still came around the same as ever, but we found ways not to be home. And then, somehow, 30 years passed, during which my brother and I married attractive women, had children, had divorces, remarried, bought and sold homes, watched too much TV, worked at careers, and just generally settled down. During that time we pretty much lost track of Uncle Wyatt. Every so often one of us might ask our father about him. "Got a postcard from him a while ago," dad would say,

chuckling. "He was in Bliss or some such place." "Bliss?" "Well, that's what he said, but the postmark said Montana." Once he told dad that he was in "Surprise, New Mexico." I looked it up. There's no such place. Uncle Wyatt's death came as a shock. When you don't see someone for years and decades they don't age, they stay just as they were the last time you saw them. And when that person is mythical, as Uncle Wyatt, in retrospect, certainly was, death doesn't seem possible. But he was gone, and here I was in his Wonder Machine, a machine I'd stopped believing in long ago if I ever had in the first place, here I was behind its wheel, *his* wheel, the wheel he'd left to me, gliding along my favourite stretch of country back road. Suddenly the obvious hit me. If the Wonder Machine was real, and it was hard to deny it now that I was traveling in it, then wasn't it possible that all those crazy stories he'd told were also true?

### Wonder Machine - Part 3

I called my wife Shelly from the highway and told her I'd been pulling up in Uncle Wyatt's Wonder Machine in about ten minutes. "What's it like?" she asked. This, of course, was a loaded question. The first thing she'd asked me once we found out I'd inherited it was "Where will we keep it?" I love my wife, but she's a practical person. We have a good driveway on a fairly large lot and a two-car garage, but even so most of the time we can't park a second car in the garage for all the boxes, lawn mowers, and bicycles cluttering up the space. "Let's cross that bridge when we get to it, honey." "How big is it?" "I don't know. I've never seen it. It could be an old Volkswagen Beetle for all I know." "Well, we don't have room for a Volkswagen Beetle." "Well, let's see what it is." "If it's bigger than a bread box it can't stay here." "Maybe it's a toy." "We don't need any more toys either." So now she was asking me *what's it like?* And I knew exactly what she meant by it, she meant *how big and ugly is it and don't think for one minute that it's staying here.* "I think you're going to love it, honey." "It's big and ugly, isn't it?" "No, it's incredible actually. I don't know how to describe it, it's..." "It's huge, isn't it?" "No, I wouldn't say huge. It looks like a cross between one of those beautiful roaring '20s millionaire's yachts and a '50s Cadillac." Silence on the other end of the line. "Honey, you there?" "Did you say a yacht and a Cadillac?" "Something like that. It's gorgeous, unique, one-of-a-kind." "It's not staying." "At least have a look at it." "I'll see you in a few minutes." I turned off the highway and stopped at a light near the big mall. There were lots of people around and the Wonder Machine was attracting some attention. Well, more than some. Actually, everyone within a hundred meters of it was gawking and pointing at it. I felt like I was the lead float in a Christmas parade. *Mommy, is that Santa?* By the time I pulled into our driveway a thousand eyes had seen the Wonder Machine, including half a dozen neighbours. "Oh my gawd," said

Shelly. I thought she was going to faint. I stepped out and smiled bravely. "Hey, what do you think?" "Oh my gawd." "Yeah, I knew you'd love it." "You're joking, right? There's a video camera recording this for a TV show, right?" "No, this is it, this is the Wonder Machine." "Yeah, it's a wonder machine all right, as in I wonder what they were thinking when they built this monstrosity." "Step inside." "Is it safe?" "Come on, step inside." I gave her the tour, front to back. "Isn't it the coolest thing you've ever seen?" "Honey, yes, it's cool, but what on earth are we going to do with it? Where are we going to put it? We have no room." "We're going to travel in it." "Maybe you are." "All of us." "You mean you and your fishing buddies." "Sure, but you and I and the kids, too." "I'm not going anywhere in it. You can take the kids if you want, but count me out." "It drives beautifully." "You can't keep it here." "Well, I thought I'd park it here for tonight anyway." "No way. Take it back to the barn." "But I just got it." "Back to the barn." Like I said, my wife is a practical woman.

#### Wonder Machine - Part 4

No sooner had my wife Shelly ordered the Wonder Machine back to its berth in Uncle Wyatt's barn than our kids, Gavin and Marta, plus two friends of theirs, Paul and Dawn, came sprinting out of the house. "Cool! Cool! What is it? What is it? Can we go for a ride? Please, please, take us for a ride!" I shrugged my shoulders and Shelly rolled her eyes. "Can we? Can we?" The kids were running in circles around the Wonder Machine. "Ask your mother." "Can we Mom, can we please?" "It's up to your father." "Can we Dad, can we?" "Sure, but only if your Mom comes." Shelly glared at me. "Come on Mom, come on!" Ten minutes later we were rolling. "Where'd you like to go?" I asked Shelly. "Doesn't matter to me." "Hey, Dad, let's go to the lake!" said Marta. "Okay, let's do it." I glanced over at Shelly and noticed that she had settled in very comfortably and appeared to be relaxing for the first time in weeks as the countryside unfolded before us. The kids meanwhile could hardly contain themselves. "This is the coolest thing ever, Dad!" said Gavin. I had to agree with him and then, all of a sudden, a ghostly image appeared on the windshield to my right. "Holy smokes!" I exclaimed, veering dangerously into the center of the two-lane road. "Watch out, Steve!" I swung us back into the lane just as a truck rounded the corner about a hundred yards up ahead. "What happened there?" asked Shelly. "Thought I saw something." "What?" "I don't know." Shelly turned back to check on the kids. They hadn't noticed a thing and were busy playing some sort of game. I hid it from Shelly, but my heart was practically beating through my chest. I could have sworn that what I'd seen on the windshield was an image of Uncle Wyatt. It had

only appeared for a split second, whatever it was, but long enough for me to recognize him – or it. Shelly settled back in and soon had her shoes off and her feet up on the console. “How do you like it?” I asked. “It rides nice. The kids seem to love it.” We reached the turn-off to Whitaker Lake without further incident and I managed to convince myself that the play of light and shadow on the window combined with all the excitement around Wyatt’s legacy had overcooked my brain. I parked the Wonder Machine close to the lake next to a grove of leafy green silver birches. The kids spilled out and ran down to the water. It was a gorgeous, sunny day, but for some reason we had the lake to ourselves. “Can we go out in the boat?” said the kids in unison. “You could if we had a boat,” I told them. “We do!” “No we don’t.” “Yes we do!” “There’s no boat.” “Yes there is. It’s in the Wonder Machine.” I looked at Shelly and she looked at me. I knew there was no boat because I’d checked out every inch of the Wonder Machine when it was moored in the barn. The kids ran to the Wonder Machine’s side door, went in, and two seconds later were ordering us to come in and see the boat. We went in and sure enough there was a boat, okay, a big yellow rubber raft, right where it wasn’t supposed to be, right where it couldn’t be, right where it hadn’t been before.

## Wonder Machine – Part 5

Just to make sure it was real and I wasn’t hallucinating again, I touched the big yellow rubber raft that was where it hadn’t existed before in the back of the Wonder Machine. “Can we take it out?” said one or all of the kids. “I guess so.” My mind was grappling with how I could have missed it when I’d inspected the Wonder Machine. Was I losing my marbles? Gavin jumped in. “How am I going to get it out with you in it, Gavin?” He jumped out, I turned it on its side, and it fit easily through the door. “If I’d known,” said Shelly, “I’d have packed bathing suits.” “Look!” said Dawn, holding up a swimsuit and towel. “And there’s more!” So there was. In a few minutes the kids had changed into swimming shorts and were paddling around the bay in the big yellow rubber raft. “So now we own a Wonder Machine and a rubber raft,” said Shelly, laughing. “I swear it wasn’t there when I picked it up.” Shelly shook her head. She didn’t believe me for a second. “I swear,” I repeated. “I suppose it just materialized,” she said, swinging her arms in a theatrical circle as she pronounced the word materialized. “Speaking of which...” I almost blurted out what I’d seen on the windshield, but

thought better of it and instead said, "I'm hungry. Wonder what's to eat, no pun intended." "Unless you bought lunch when you bought the raft, you're out of luck." "I didn't buy anything. I'm telling you I did not buy that raft." "Well then, it belonged to Wyatt." "I guess it must have." I went back into the Wonder Machine on the off chance that I might find something to drink and maybe a box of crackers. What I found, when I opened a cupboard, were fully stocked shelves. I mean, there was everything you could ever want to eat. I shut the cupboard door, waited a beat, and then reopened it, slowly, praying for it to be empty. It was full. I shut the door and tried to control my heart rate. I knew, for certain, that I'd opened every cupboard door on board back in the barn and the shelves had been completely empty. I tried the fridge. Damn! It was fully stocked as well. There was juice, milk, eggs, cheese, lettuce, and pickles. There was even beer and a bottle of very good Champagne. Damn! How was it possible? I'd checked the fridge back in the barn. A guy always checks the fridge. If a guy finds a rotten old wooden icebox in a ruined cabin in the woods he opens it with hope in his heart. THIS FRIDGE WAS EMPTY! I was losing it, I was definitely losing it. "Shelly!" She was standing on the beach watching the kids, all good swimmers in shallow water. "What's up, wonder boy?" "I have to show you something. You won't believe it." She yelled to the kids, "Don't go out any farther!" She turned around and walked back to the Wonder Machine. "Let me guess," she said, entering, "There's caviar and lobster in the larder." "See for yourself." I opened the fridge door and she looked in. "Oh my gawd." "What do you think of that?" "I think you spent way too much money, honey." "Me? No, no, no! I spent nothing, nothing! I didn't buy this food." She looked at me and shook her head. "Honey, isn't this routine of yours getting a little old?" "Look in the cupboards." She opened one up and inspected a can of tinned smoked oysters. "You shouldn't have, honey." Tinned smoked oysters are her favourite. "That's right and I didn't." She replaced the oysters on the shelf and gave me a kiss. "I guess we'll just have to eat lunch." She left me standing there and went to check on the kids. "Yeah," I said out loud, "We'll just have to eat lunch."

## Wonder Machine – Part 6

Well, what a day we had at the lake. Late in the afternoon we headed back home, the kids sleeping happily in the back all the way. That evening my brother Andy, the lawyer, called me up.

"How's the old Wonder Machine?"

"As billed."

"What do you mean?"

"It's amazing. It takes you where you want to go with the people you want to go with and then, when you get there, it provides you with everything you need."

"Are you okay?"

"I know, I know, it sounds weird, but it's true. Everything Uncle Wyatt said about it is true – it's a wonder machine."

"Good, so long as you're happy. How does Shelly like it?"

"At first she had her doubts, but now she's a convert."

"Really? Shelly?"

"You know how much she likes oysters, right?"

"Right."

"Well, when it came time for lunch the Wonder Machine had them."

"I don't get it. You mean you bought oysters."

"No. They were already on board."

"Okay, so Wyatt bought them."

"The shelves were empty when I picked it up from the barn."

"What barn?"

"Wyatt's barn, the one on his farm."

"There's no barn on his farm. It burned down twenty years ago."

"He must have rebuilt it because it was definitely in a barn."

"That's strange."

He didn't know the half of it. The Wonder Machine sat in the driveway for a week or so and then one night I had a dream. In this dream Uncle Wyatt came to me and put a fishing rod in my hand. At least it was a fishing rod until it became a sword. And then the next thing I knew I was on one of those medieval jousting horses galloping down a dirt road in Sherwood Forest or so it seemed to me in my dream state. It was a great dream, one of those ones where you're aware of it and you're actually laughing out loud in your sleep.

"What's so funny?" asked Shelly, shaking my shoulder.

"Oh, man! Ha-ha! Wow! I was dreaming I was on a horse galloping down a dirt road in the days of Robin Hood. I had a sword in my hand that was actually a fishing rod. Whoa!"

"Did you eat cheese before bed last night?"

This was on a Thursday. On Friday Shelly and the kids were going to visit an old friend of hers, so I had the weekend to myself. I thought maybe Andy would like to join me in a road trip, but he was busy with work and his kids. So on Friday morning I set off for parts unknown, as they say.

## Wonder Machine – Part 7

I had gone about a hundred clicks in the Wonder Machine on my way to "parts unknown" when it occurred to me that I might want to check the gas. I looked all

over the dash but couldn't see anything indicating what was left in the tank. So I pulled into a service station and asked the attendant to fill it up.

"Where's the tank?"

"Good question." I realized I had no idea where. "Where is it usually?"

"Well, it's usually on the side here, but I don't see nothing."

"I'll help you look."

So the attendant and I spent the next five minutes looking high and low and couldn't find the entrance to the tank.

"Excuse me," he said, sauntering off to look after another customer.

I circled the Wonder Machine six or seven more times, but couldn't find the spot. Then I jumped back inside and started looking for an owner's manual or any set of general directions. Nothing. I scanned the dash for a gas gauge, but there wasn't one. This is crazy, I thought. Even a wonder machine needs gas. I got out and went into the station. There was an older guy there wiping his hands with a rag and I asked him he would help me out. He went all over the Wonder Machine and couldn't find any gas tank either.

"Where's the engine in this thing?" he asked.

Engine? If I have ever felt dumber in my life I can't remember when. Engine?

How was I supposed to know about the engine? I was just the driver.

"In the usual place," I said, trying to sound confident.

"Nope," he said, shaking his head, "I already looked. It's not in the usual place.

In fact, I can't find it, so I was hoping you'd know how this thing runs." There was no way I was going to try to explain to him the things I knew about the Wonder Machine, no way.

"Well, thanks anyway."

He looked at me like he was making sure he'd remember my face when it came up on some TV most wanted show. Most wanted nut bars. I got back behind the wheel and pulled onto the highway with no idea of how much farther I'd get or even if I had an engine. Let me tell you, it's a little unnerving to be cruising on a highway at 100 clicks and not know for certain that an engine is doing all the work. You got to have a lot of faith for that and quite frankly I don't go to church all that often. Despite the doubts, the Wonder Machine and I rolled merrily along, familiar sights and little towns zipping by until at last we came into the high country with its hidden emerald lakes and big pines and sagebrush. I was busy taking in the good clean air and the countryside when the radio, which I thought I'd turned off hours before, suddenly came on all crackly and staticky.

"Hey! Hey! This is the life, eh?"

I thought I'd picked up some trucker frequency and tried to turn it off, but it already was.

"Hey! Hey! Jerry, how do you like it?"

"Who? What?"

"Jerry, it's me, Wyatt."

"What? Who?"

"Ha-ha! It's me Jerry, your old Uncle Wyatt."

First the windshield apparition, now the radio was talking to me. Hey! Hey!  
Wonder Machine - Part 8

So good old Uncle Wyatt, the man who'd told us those crazy stories way back when, was now broadcasting on his very own frequency: DEAD FM. What's my response? Knucklehead that I am, I play along.

"You're on the radio Uncle Wyatt?"

"Sure, got my own show now."

"You do?"

"Course not! I'm just making contact with you, as we like to say."

"We?"

"Ha-ha! Never mind, Jerry. Nothing to worry about. So how do you like it?"

"Is it really you Wyatt?"

"No, it's really Avril Lavigne. Of course it's me!"

"I'm a little worried, uh, Uncle Wyatt, because, uh, you know, it's not considered normal to talk to the radio."

"Would you prefer me in the seat next to you?"

"No! I mean, yes, but not at this exact moment."

"Ha-ha! Know just how you feel, Jerry, believe me."

"It is you, isn't it?"

"Absolutely, in all but flesh."

"I miss you."

"Well, thanks Jerry. We didn't see much of each other over the last ten or so years before my sad demise - ha-ha! But never mind! No regrets! So tell me, isn't she a wonder?"

And so it went, me and the radio chatting, until it was dark and time to pull off for the night. I don't know how long we spoke, but Wyatt did most of the talking and death hadn't dulled his enthusiasm for philosophizing and yarn spinning. He said some crazy wise stuff and you'll see what I mean. I awoke feeling like I'd gone under an anesthetic. Not that I felt groggy, in fact I felt energized. It was more the feeling that I'd just shut my eyes for a split second and then opened them again. It was morning, about 7:30, and the sun was flooding into the Wonder Machine. The last thing I remembered was pulling off the highway. Where was I? I opened the door and stepped out. I was in a clearing full of wild flowers next to a boulder strewn river. I was alone. And then I remembered the conversation with the radio. Or had I dreamed it? Must have dreamed it. Must have been more tired than I thought. Must have hallucinated. I went back inside. Eggs and sausages were frying in the pan. The toast popped up. Fresh coffee was steaming in the coffee maker. No engine, no gas, and it makes breakfast for you. This is insane! And then, right then and there, out of nowhere, something inside me cracked, like an egg, and all at once I was at ease, all at once I got it, the whole

Wonder Machine thing, it all came to me, the meaning of life, everything, in a great snapping egg cracking rush. And the message was – go with it. Don't resist. Accept. Ha-ha! Where had I heard that? Wyatt, of course. Ha-ha! Ha-ha! I started doing a little jig right then and there. Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Whoopee! I get it! Halleluiah! Well, I grabbed my coffee and stepped outside and felt so good I couldn't stop dancing around and if there'd been a willing animal I'd have hugged it and started dancing, a bear, a deer, a coyote, whatever, I'd have done it, I swear, I just felt so good.

## Wonder Machine – Part 9

I finished the coffee, eggs, toast, and sausages and while I was eating I knew that the first thing I had to do was climb the highest thing around. So off I went up this big old hill. When I got to the top I could see for miles around, stands of green pine and shining blue lakes as far as the eye could see. It looked so beautiful I could hardly stand it and I knew I had to have it. So I did what Wyatt had told me and reached out and grabbed hold of the green pines and the shining blue lakes, very gently so they wouldn't be damaged, and put them in my pocket and went down the hill whistling. When I got back to the Wonder Machine I grabbed a fishing rod and went in search of a nice deep dark still pool in the river. I went a few hundred yards and found a likely spot. I snuck up to it very quietly being careful not to let my shadow fall across the pool. Then I cast up toward the rocks over which the river was tumbling. In short order I had a fish on the line. I kept at it for an hour or so and I caught three lovely speckled trout of about three pounds each, which I released. The sun was getting too high for fishing so I had a last look around. What a gorgeous spot. There was the steel blue river and the big boulders. There was the alder along the banks and the tree branches that had washed down in the spring. There were the dozens of small waterfalls as the river dropped over the rocks. There was the deep, cool, almost black pool and there was the opening in the pines and birch and the great limitless luminous blue above. I had to have it all. I reached out and gathered it all in, the river, the rocks, the alder, the fish, the sky, and held it a minute in my hands just because it felt so good, and then, dripping wet, I put it in my pocket along with the green pines and the shining blue lakes. As I walked back to the Wonder Machine I sang a song I remembered from my youth. "La de da la de da de day, la de da la de day-ay, he whistled and he sang till the green woods rang, and he won the heart of a la-a-a-dy..." When I got back to the Wonder Machine I took everything out of my pocket, sky, river, trees, all of it, and arranged it on a shelf above the bed. I wanted to be able to look at everything before I went to sleep and first thing in the morning. I know how this must sound, totally nutty. Even as I write this I can hardly believe it myself. I had never done anything like this before and if it hadn't been for Wyatt and his Wonder Machine it probably

wouldn't have happened. All I can tell you is that something came over me or something lifted within me, I can't say exactly, but you know what I mean, things shifted inside me, and suddenly I had a new perspective. You know what it was like? It was like falling in love. The night we talked over the radio Wyatt had asked me, "When was the last time you fell in love?"

#### Wonder Machine - Part 10

"When was the last time you fell in love?" That's what Wyatt asked me that night we spoke via the radio in the Wonder Machine.

"I don't know, Uncle Wyatt."

"You don't know?"

"I don't remember."

"You're farther gone than I thought."

"I'm a middle aged man, Wyatt, we don't go around falling in love."

"That's your problem."

"I love Shelly and the kids."

"That's a start, that's the important thing, but I'm not talking about that kind of love."

"Well..."

"There's all kinds of love, you know."

"I suppose."

"Ha-ha! Oh boy, you're in for it! You are going to fall hard!"

"Cut it out, Wyatt."

"Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Oh man, you're going to love it! Love it!"

I had no idea what he was talking about. I didn't even really believe it was him. To be honest I thought I was having some sort of mental episode. Love? Me? Give me a break. But here I was, half a day later, and I was giddy inside like a teenage girl, I was all charged up, I was reaching out and getting hold of things and putting them on a shelf above my bed. If this was having a mental episode then fine I was having a mental episode. Let's have more mental episodes. In fact let's turn an episode into a series. Let's have a series of mental episodes. Well, I hated to leave the spot but I had the best of it on the shelf for future reference and so I drove on out to the highway to see what lay in store. I hadn't gone more

than a mile when I spotted a guy with his thumb out trying to hitch a ride. Something told me I should make an exception to my rule and stop and give this guy a lift. He was an older gent, late 70s, and he had leather beaten face and hands like the roots of an old shrub. I liked him right away. He told me that his sister had died and he wanted to get to her funeral but he no longer had a car and the bus didn't go there, so he was forced to hitch. I had no plan in mind so I said I'd be happy to take him there. His name was William and he was a very modest guy, humble, the type who doesn't want to bore you with a lot of talk, but I couldn't contain myself and so I said, just to get the ball rolling, I said, "William," I said, "I have to tell you, and you're the first person I've told, but I'm in love for the first time in I don't know how long." He looked at me and smiled and nodded his head like he knew what I meant. "Well, good for you," he said, "Know what beats a royal flush?" "Nothing." "Love." I laughed and he laughed. Then he told me some of his life story, how he'd been a cowboy, a drill rigger, a bartender, and a cab driver. He and his wife had raised four kids, all married and gone and kids of their own. His wife had died a few years back and he didn't miss her because there wasn't anything they didn't want to do that they hadn't and nothing undone that might have been done and nothing unsaid that should have been said. He made a lot of sense and I was glad I'd stopped.

#### Wonder Machine - Part 11

Well, I guess William and I traveled about 200 miles together and we covered about the same distance getting acquainted, too. He asked me about the "rig" I was driving, said he'd never seen anything quite like it, so I started to tell him all about Wyatt and he stopped me and asked, "Wyatt Keepnews?"

"That's right. You knew him?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "Knew him? We only grew up together."

"You must be kidding."

"Grew up with him, went to school with him, even fought a war with him. How is he anyway?"

"He passed away not long ago."

He nodded his head.

"This is a real coincidence me picking you up in his rig."

"Coincidence? No such thing in life. You live to be my age you learn that."

I got the low down on his sister. She'd been living for a number of years in a retirement home and he hadn't been to visit her in some time on account of not being mobile. Now it was her funeral. "We're all just passing through," he said. When we got to the town I told him that it had been a real pleasure having his company and we shook hands and away he went. I had no idea where I was going next until I remembered something William had said about a music festival about fifty miles east. He'd said that it had a reputation of being a wild and crazy place with all sorts of shenanigans going on at all times of day and

night and so I thought, yeah, that's for me! This town was like a scene out of an old western movie starring Alan Rudolph. No building on the main drag was less than a hundred years old. You expected to see Little Joe and Hoss and Matt Dillon, Kitty, and Doc. I was directed to the fairgrounds where I could park the Wonder Machine overnight for \$40. Once I was parked I headed out to do some exploring of the old Western town and to find out where the music was. I strolled around town along with thousands of other folks and grabbed a roast beef on a bun and a bottle of beer. There was lots of energy in the air and everyone was happy to be there and so was I. I wanted to hear some music and so I followed the general flow of everyone across a bridge and into a park and then up a hill and over and down into a sort of valley. There had to be 20,000 people there already with more coming in every minute. There was a big stage with a huge sound system and everyone was sitting on blankets on the ground. The first thing that came into my mind was that this was like Woodstock. I never got to Woodstock but this might be my Woodstock. A band was all set up on the stage and ready to go. The lead guitarist silently counted off 1,2,3 and then the band kicked in and a massive cheer went up. I'd never heard of the band but they could play. I found a spot and sat down and let the music carry me away to wherever it wanted to take me.